

# Pray the Rosary for Peace

## in families, nations and throughout the world

### Message from Pope Benedict XVI on the Rosary

On Sunday, October 7, 2007, on the Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary before the Angelus, Pope Benedict XVI addressed the faithful:

"Dear Brothers and Sisters, this first Sunday of October offers us two reasons for prayer and reflection: the Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary, which is celebrated precisely today, and missionary commitment, to which this month is especially dedicated. The traditional image of Our Lady of the Rosary portrays Mary who with one arm supports the Child Jesus and with the other is offering the rosary beads to St. Dominic.

This important iconography shows that the Rosary is a means given by the Virgin to contemplate Jesus and, in meditating on his life, to love him and follow him ever more faithfully. It is this message that Our Lady has also bequeathed to us in her various apparitions. I am thinking in particular of the apparition in Fatima that occurred 90 years ago. Presenting herself as "Our Lady of the Rosary", she insistently recommended the daily recitation of the Rosary to the three little shepherd children, Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco, in order to obtain the end of the war. Let us also accept the Virgin's motherly request, pledging to recite the Rosary with faith for peace in families, nations and throughout the world."

**Pope Benedict XVI**



2008 is the 800th anniversary  
of Our Blessed Mother's gift of the Rosary to us

It was at Prouille, France in 1208 that Dominic suddenly experienced an Apparition of the Blessed Mother, who said, "Wonder not that you have obtained so little fruit by your labors. You have spent them on barren soil, not yet watered with the dew of Divine grace. When God willed to renew the face of the earth, He began by sending down on it fertilizing rain of the Angelic Salutation. Therefore preach my psalter composed of 150 Angelic Salutations and fifteen Our Fathers, and you will obtain an abundant harvest."

Over the years the Popes have insisted on the recitation and the meditation of the Rosary. It is because they know that the Church and mankind face great dangers...the threat of war, the attacks against the Church, against the family, against the unborn...and this can only be stopped through Divine intervention. As Pope John Paul II the Great wrote:

"The Church has always attributed particular efficacy to this prayer, entrusting to the Rosary the most difficult problems. At times when Christianity itself seemed under threat, its deliverance was attributed to the power of this prayer, and Our Lady was acclaimed as the one whose intercession brought salvation."

Therefore let us ask our Blessed Lady to give us the grace and the zeal of true apostles to make her known and loved through the propagation and recitation of the Rosary. Let us read and meditate carefully this letter of the servant of God Pope John Paul II on the Rosary, which is, as he called it himself, "a treasure to be rediscovered".

## APOSTOLIC LETTER ON THE ROSARY BY POPE JOHN PAUL II

### Rosarium Virginis Mariae

#### INTRODUCTION

The Rosary of the Virgin Mary, which gradually took form in the second millennium under the guidance of the Spirit of God, is a prayer loved by countless Saints and encouraged by the Magisterium. Simple yet profound, it still remains, at the dawn of this third millennium, a prayer of great significance, destined to bring forth a harvest of holiness. It blends easily into the spiritual journey of the Christian life, which, after two thousand years, has lost none of the freshness of its beginnings and feels drawn by the Spirit of God to "set out into the deep" (*duc in altum!*) in order once more to proclaim, and even cry out, before the world that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour, "the way, and the truth and the life" (*Jn 14:6*), "the goal of human history and the point on which the desires of history and civilization turn".

The Rosary, though clearly Marian in character, is at heart a Christocentric prayer. In the sobriety of its elements, it has all the depth of the Gospel message in its entirety, of which it can be said to be a compendium. It is an echo of the prayer of Mary, her perennial Magnificat for the work of the redemptive Incarnation which began in her virginal womb. With the Rosary, the Christian people sits at the school of Mary and is led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love. Through the Rosary the faithful receive abundant grace, as though from the very hands of the Mother of the Redeemer.

#### The Popes and the Rosary

Numerous predecessors of mine attributed great importance to this prayer. Worthy of special note in this regard is Pope Leo XIII who on Sep-

tember 1, 1883 promulgated the Encyclical *Supremi Apostolatus Officio*, a document of great worth, the first of his many statements about this prayer, in which he proposed the Rosary as an effective spiritual weapon against the evils afflicting society. Among the more recent Popes who, from the time of the Second Vatican Council, have distinguished themselves in promoting the Rosary I would mention Blessed John XXIII and above all Pope Paul VI, who in his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* emphasized, in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, the Rosary's evangelical character and its Christocentric inspiration.

I myself have often encouraged the frequent recitation of the Rosary. From my youthful years this prayer has held an important place in my spiritual life. I was powerfully reminded of this during my recent visit to Poland, and in particular at the Shrine of Kalwaria. The Rosary has accompanied me in moments of joy and in moments of difficulty. To it I have entrusted any number of concerns; in it I have always found comfort.



Twenty-four years ago, on October 29, 1978, scarcely two weeks after my election to the See of Peter, I frankly admitted:

"The Rosary is my favourite prayer. A marvellous prayer! Marvellous in its simplicity and its depth. (...) It can be said that the Rosary is, in some sense, a prayer-commentary on the final chapter of the Vatican II Constitution *Lumen*

*Gentium*, a chapter which discusses the wondrous presence of the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and the Church. Against the background of the words Ave Maria the principal events of the life of Jesus Christ pass before the eyes of the soul. They take shape in the complete series of the joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries, and they put us in living communion with Jesus through – we might say – the heart of his Mother. At the same time our heart can embrace in the decades of the Rosary all the events that make up the lives of individuals, families, nations, the Church, and all mankind. Our personal concerns and those of our neighbour, especially those who are closest to us, who are dearest to us. Thus the simple prayer of the Rosary marks the rhythm of human life".

With these words, dear brothers and sisters, I set the first year of my Pontificate within the daily rhythm of the Rosary. Today, as I begin the twenty-fifth year of my service as the Successor of Peter, I wish to do the same. How many graces have I received in these years from the Blessed Virgin through the Rosary: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum!* I wish to lift up my thanks to the Lord in the words of his Most Holy Mother, under whose protection I have placed my Petrine ministry: *Totus Tuus!*

Therefore, in continuity with my reflection in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, in which, after the experience of the Jubilee, I invited the people of God to "start afresh from Christ", I have felt drawn to offer a reflection on the Rosary, as a kind of Marian complement to that Letter and an exhortation to contemplate the face of Christ in union with, and at the school of, his Most Holy Mother. To recite the Rosary is nothing other than to contemplate with Mary the face of Christ. As a way of highlighting this invitation, prompted by the forthcoming 120th anniversary of the aforementioned Encyclical of Leo XIII, I desire that during the course of this year the Rosary should be especially emphasized and promoted in the various Christian communities.

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# Contemplation of the Mystery of Christ

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I therefore proclaim the year from October 2002 to October 2003 the Year of the Rosary.

I leave this pastoral proposal to the initiative of each ecclesial community. It is not my intention to encumber but rather to complete and consolidate pastoral programmes of the Particular Churches. I am confident that the proposal will find a ready and generous reception. The Rosary, reclaimed in its full meaning, goes to the very heart of Christian life; it offers a familiar yet fruitful, spiritual and educational opportunity for personal contemplation, the formation of the People of God, and the new evangelization. I am pleased to reaffirm this also in the joyful remembrance of another anniversary: the fortieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council on October 11, 1962, the "great grace" disposed by the Spirit of God for the Church in our time.

## Objections to the Rosary

The timeliness of this proposal is evident from a number of considerations. First, the urgent need to counter a certain crisis of the Rosary, which in the present historical and theological context can risk being wrongly devalued, and therefore no longer taught to the younger generation. There are some who think that the centrality of the Liturgy, rightly stressed by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, necessarily entails giving lesser importance to the Rosary. Yet, as Pope Paul VI made clear, not only does this prayer not conflict with the Liturgy, it sustains it, since it serves as an excellent introduction and a faithful echo of the Liturgy, enabling people to participate fully and interiorly in it and to reap its fruits in their daily lives.

Perhaps too, there are some who fear that the Rosary is somehow unecumenical because of its distinctly Marian character. Yet the Rosary clearly belongs to the kind of veneration of the Mother of God described by the Council: a devotion directed to the Christological centre of the Christian faith, in such a way that "when the Mother is honoured, the Son ... is duly known, loved and glorified". If properly revitalized, the Rosary is an aid and certainly not a hindrance to ecumenism!

## A path of contemplation

But the most important reason for strongly encouraging the practice of the Rosary is that it represents a most effective means of fostering among the faithful that commitment to the contemplation of the Christian mystery which I have proposed in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* as a genuine "training in holiness": "What is needed is a Christian life distinguished above all in the art of prayer". Inasmuch as contemporary culture, even amid so many indications to the contrary, has witnessed the flowering of a new call for spirituality, due also to the influence of other religions, it is more urgent than ever that our Christian communities should become "genuine schools of prayer".

The Rosary belongs among the finest and most praiseworthy traditions of Christian contemplation. Developed in the West, it is a typically meditative prayer, corresponding in some way to the "prayer of the heart" or "Jesus prayer" which took root in the soil of the Christian East.

## Prayer for peace and for the family

**A number of historical circumstances also make a revival of the Rosary quite timely. First of all, the need to implore from God the gift of peace.** The Rosary has many times been proposed by my predecessors and myself as a prayer for peace. At the start of a millennium which began with the terrifying attacks of September 11, 2001, a millennium which witnesses every day in numerous parts of the world fresh scenes of bloodshed and violence, to rediscover the Rosary means to immerse oneself in contemplation of the mystery of Christ who "is our peace", since he made "the two of us one, and broke down the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2:14). Consequently, one cannot recite the Rosary without feeling caught up in a clear commitment to advancing peace, especially in the land of Jesus, still so sorely afflicted and so close to the heart of every Christian.

**A similar need for commitment and prayer arises in relation to another critical contemporary issue: the family, the primary cell of society,**

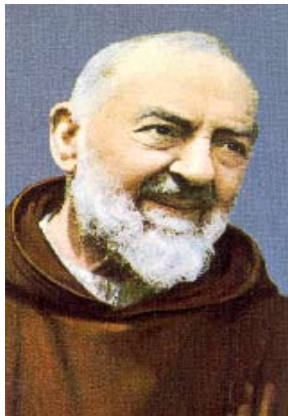
**increasingly menaced by forces of disintegration on both the ideological and practical planes, so as to make us fear for the future of this fundamental and indispensable institution and, with it, for the future of society as a whole.** The revival of the Rosary in Christian families, within the context of a broader pastoral ministry to the family, will be an effective aid to countering the devastating effects of this crisis typical of our age.

## "Behold, your Mother!" (Jn 19:27)

Many signs indicate that still today the Blessed Virgin desires to exercise through this same prayer that maternal concern to which the dying Redeemer entrusted, in the person of the beloved disciple, all the sons and daughters of the Church: "Woman, behold your son!" (Jn 19:26). Well-known are the occasions in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries on which the Mother of Christ made her presence felt and her voice heard, in order to exhort the People of God to this form of contemplative prayer. I would mention in particular, on account of their great influence on the lives of Christians and the authoritative recognition they have received from the Church, the apparitions of Lourdes and of Fatima; these shrines continue to be visited by great numbers of pilgrims seeking comfort and hope.

## Following the witnesses

It would be impossible to name all the many Saints who discovered in the Rosary a genuine path to growth in holiness. We need but mention Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort, the author of an excellent work on the Rosary (*The Secret of the Rosary*), and, closer to ourselves, Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, whom I recently had the joy of canonizing. As a true apostle of the Rosary, Blessed Bartolo Longo had a special charism. His path to holiness rested on an inspiration heard in the depths of his heart: "Whoever spreads the Rosary is saved!"



Saint Padre Pio and Blessed Bartolo Longo

As a result, he felt called to build a Church dedicated to Our Lady of the Holy Rosary in Pompei, against the background of the ruins of the ancient city, which scarcely heard the proclamation of Christ before being buried in 79 A.D. during an eruption of Mount Vesuvius, only to emerge centuries later from its ashes as a witness to the lights and shadows of classical civilization. By his whole life's work and especially by the practice of the "Fifteen Saturdays", Bartolo Longo promoted the Christocentric and contemplative heart of the Rosary, and received great encouragement and support from Leo XIII, the "Pope of the Rosary".

## A face radiant as the sun

"And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun" (Mt 17:2). The Gospel scene of Christ's transfiguration, in which the three Apostles Peter, James and John appear entranced by the beauty of the Redeemer, can be seen as an icon of Christian contemplation. To look upon the face of Christ, to recognize its mystery amid the dai-

ly events and the sufferings of his human life, and then to grasp the divine splendour definitively revealed in the Risen Lord, seated in glory at the right hand of the Father: this is the task of every follower of Christ and therefore the task of each one of us.

In contemplating Christ's face we become open to receiving the mystery of Trinitarian life, experiencing ever anew the love of the Father and delighting in the joy of the Holy Spirit. Saint Paul's words can then be applied to us: "Beholding the glory of the Lord, we are being changed into his likeness, from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18).

## Mary, model of contemplation

The contemplation of Christ has an incomparable model in Mary. In a

unique way the face of the Son belongs to Mary. It was in her womb that Christ was formed, receiving from her a human resemblance which points to an even greater spiritual closeness. No one has ever devoted himself to the contemplation of the face of Christ as faithfully as Mary.

## Mary's memories

Mary lived with her eyes fixed on Christ, treasuring his every word: "She kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19; cf. 2:51). The memories of Jesus, impressed upon her heart, were always with her, leading her to reflect on the various moments of her life at her Son's side. In a way those memories were to be the "rosary" which she recited uninterruptedly throughout her earthly life.

Even now, amid the joyful songs of the heavenly Jerusalem, the reasons for her thanksgiving and praise remain unchanged. They inspire her maternal concern for the pilgrim Church, in which she continues to relate her personal account of the Gospel. Mary constantly sets before the faithful the "mysteries" of her Son, with the desire that the contemplation of those mysteries will release all their saving power. In the recitation of the Rosary, the Christian community enters into contact with the memories and the contemplative gaze of Mary.

## The Rosary, a contemplative prayer

The Rosary, precisely because it starts with Mary's own experience, is an exquisitely contemplative prayer. Without this contemplative dimension, it would lose its meaning, as Pope Paul VI clearly pointed out: "Without contemplation, the Rosary is a body without a soul, and its recitation runs the risk of becoming a mechanical repetition of formulas, in violation of the admonition of Christ: 'In praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think they will be heard for their many words' (Mt 6:7). By its nature the recitation of the Rosary calls for a quiet rhythm and a lingering pace, helping the individual to meditate on the mysteries of the Lord's life as seen through the eyes of her who was closest to the Lord. In this way the unfathomable riches of these mysteries are disclosed" (Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, n. 47).

It is worth pausing to consider this profound insight of Paul VI, in order to bring out certain aspects of the Rosary which show that it is really a form of Christocentric contemplation.

## Remembering Christ with Mary

Mary's contemplation is above all a remembering. We need to understand this word in the biblical sense of remembrance (*zakar*) as a making present of the works brought about by God in the history of salvation. The Bible is an account of saving events culminating in Christ himself. These events not only belong to "yesterday"; they are also part of the "today" of salvation. This making present comes about above all in the Liturgy: what God accomplished centuries ago did not only affect the direct witnesses of those events; it continues to affect people in every age with its gift of grace. To some extent this is

# Mary teaches us to contemplate Christ

also true of every other devout approach to those events: to “remember” them in a spirit of faith and love is to be open to the grace which Christ won for us by the mysteries of his life, death and resurrection.

Consequently, while it must be reaffirmed with the Second Vatican Council that the Liturgy, as the exercise of the priestly office of Christ and an act of public worship, is “the summit to which the activity of the Church is directed and the font from which all its power flows”, it is also necessary to recall that the spiritual life “is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy. Christians, while they are called to prayer in common, must also go to their own rooms to pray to their Father in secret (cf. Mt 6:6); indeed, according to the teaching of the Apostle, they must pray without ceasing (cf. 1 Thes 5:17)”.

The Rosary, in its own particular way, is part of this varied panorama of “ceaseless” prayer. If the Liturgy, as the activity of Christ and the Church, is a saving action par excellence, the Rosary too, as a “meditation” with Mary on Christ, is a salutary contemplation. By immersing us in the mysteries of the Redeemer’s life, it ensures that what he has done and what the liturgy makes present is profoundly assimilated and shapes our existence.

## Learning Christ from Mary

Christ is the supreme Teacher, the revealer and the one revealed. It is not just a question of learning what he taught but of “learning him”. In this regard could we have any better teacher than Mary? From the divine standpoint, the Spirit is the interior teacher who leads us to the full truth of Christ (cf. Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). But among creatures no one knows Christ better than Mary; no one can introduce us to a profound knowledge of his mystery better than his Mother.

The first of the “signs” worked by Jesus – the changing of water into wine at the marriage in Cana – clearly presents Mary in the guise of a teacher, as she urges the servants to do what Jesus commands (cf. Jn 2:5). We can imagine that she would have done likewise for the disciples after Jesus’ Ascension, when she joined them in awaiting the Holy Spirit and supported them in their first mission. Contemplating the scenes of the Rosary in union with Mary is a means of learning from her to “read” Christ, to discover his secrets and to understand his message.

This school of Mary is all the more effective if we consider that she teaches by obtaining for us in abundance the gifts of the Holy Spirit, even as she offers us the incomparable example of her own “pilgrimage of faith”. As we contemplate each mystery of her Son’s life, she invites us to do as she did at the Annunciation: to ask humbly the questions which open us to the light, in order to end with the obedience of faith: “Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

## Being conformed to Christ with Mary

Christian spirituality is distinguished by the disciple’s commitment to become conformed ever more fully to his Master (cf. Rom 8:29; Phil 3:10,12). (...) In the spiritual journey of the Rosary, based on the constant contemplation – in Mary’s company – of the face of Christ, this demanding ideal of being conformed to him is pursued through an association which could be described in terms of friendship. We are thereby enabled to enter naturally into Christ’s life and as it were to share his deepest feelings. In this regard Blessed Bartolo Longo has written:

**“Just as two friends, frequently in each other’s company, tend to develop similar habits, so too, by holding familiar converse with Jesus and the Blessed Virgin, by meditating on the myster-**

**ies of the Rosary and by living the same life in Holy Communion, we can become, to the extent of our lowliness, similar to them and can learn from these supreme models a life of humility, poverty, hiddenness, patience and perfection”.**

In this process of being conformed to Christ in the Rosary, we entrust ourselves in a special way to the maternal care of the Blessed Virgin. She who is both the Mother of Christ and a member of the Church, indeed her “pre-eminent and altogether singular member”, is at the same time the “Mother of the Church”. As such, she continually brings to birth children for the mystical Body of her Son. She does so through her intercession, imploring upon them the inexhaustible outpouring of the Spirit. Mary is the perfect icon of the motherhood of the Church.



Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort

The Rosary mystically transports us to Mary’s side as she is busy watching over the human growth of Christ in the home of Nazareth. This enables her to train us and to mold us with the same care, until Christ is “fully formed” in us (cf. Gal 4:19). This role of Mary, totally grounded in that of Christ and radically subordinated to it, “in no way ob-

scures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power”.

This is the luminous principle expressed by the Second Vatican Council which I have so powerfully experienced in my own life and have made the basis of my episcopal motto: *Totus Tuus*. The motto is of course inspired by the teaching of Saint Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort, who explained in the following words Mary’s role in the process of our configuration to Christ:

**“Our entire perfection consists in being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus Christ. Hence the most perfect of all devotions is undoubtedly that which conforms, unites and consecrates us most perfectly to Jesus Christ. Now, since Mary is of all creatures the one most conformed to Jesus Christ, it follows that among all devotions that which most consecrates and conforms a soul to our Lord is devotion to Mary, his Holy Mother, and that the more a soul is consecrated to her the more will it be consecrated to Jesus Christ”** (*Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*). Never as in the Rosary do the life of Jesus and that of Mary appear so deeply joined. Mary lives only in Christ and for Christ!

## Praying to Christ with Mary

Jesus invited us to turn to God with insistence and the confidence that we will be heard: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Mt 7:7). The basis for this power of prayer is the goodness of the Father, but also the mediation of Christ himself (cf. 1 Jn 2:1) and the working of the Holy Spirit who “intercedes for us” according to the will of God (cf. Rom 8:26-27). For “we do not know how to pray as we ought” (Rom 8:26), and at times we are not heard “because we ask wrongly” (cf. Jas 4:2-3).

In support of the prayer which Christ and the Spirit cause to rise in our hearts, Mary intervenes with her maternal intercession. “The prayer of the Church is sustained by the prayer of Mary” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2679). If Jesus, the one Mediator, is the Way of our prayer, then Mary, his purest and most transparent reflection, shows us the Way. “Beginning with Mary’s unique cooperation with the working of the Holy Spirit, the Churches developed their prayer to the Holy Mother of God, centering it on the person of Christ manifested in his mysteries”. At the wedding of Cana the Gospel clearly shows the power of Mary’s intercession as she makes known to Jesus the needs of others: “They have no wine” (Jn 2:3).

The Rosary is both meditation and supplication. Insistent prayer to the Mother of God is based on confidence that her maternal intercession can

obtain all things from the heart of her Son. She is “all-powerful by grace”, to use the bold expression, which needs to be properly understood, of Blessed Bartolo Longo in his *Supplication to Our Lady*. This is a conviction which, beginning with the Gospel, has grown ever more firm in the experience of the Christian people. The supreme poet Dante expresses it marvelously in the lines sung by Saint Bernard: “Lady, thou art so great and so powerful, that whoever desires grace yet does not turn to thee, would have his desire fly without wings”. When in the Rosary we plead with Mary, the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1:35), she intercedes for us before the Father who filled her with grace and before the Son born of her womb, praying with us and for us.

## Proclaiming Christ with Mary

The Rosary is also a path of proclamation and increasing knowledge, in which the mystery of Christ is presented again and again at different levels of the Christian experience. Its form is that of a prayerful and contemplative presentation, capable of forming Christians according to the heart of Christ. When the recitation of the Rosary combines all the elements needed for an effective meditation, especially in its communal celebration in parishes and shrines, it can present a significant catechetical opportunity which pastors should use to advantage. In this way too Our Lady of the Rosary continues her work of proclaiming Christ.

**The history of the Rosary shows how this prayer was used in particular by the Dominicans at a difficult time for the Church due to the spread of heresy. Today we are facing new challenges. Why should we not once more have recourse to the Rosary, with the same faith as those who have gone before us? The Rosary retains all its power and continues to be a valuable pastoral resource for every good evangelizer.**

## The Rosary, “a compendium of the Gospel”

The only way to approach the contemplation of Christ’s face is by listening in the Spirit to the Father’s voice, since “no one knows the Son except the Father” (Mt 11:27). In the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus responded to Peter’s confession of faith by indicating the source of that clear intuition of his identity: “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 16:17). What is needed, then, is a revelation from above. In order to receive that revelation, attentive listening is indispensable: “Only the experience of silence and prayer offers the proper setting for the growth and development of a true, faithful and consistent knowledge of that mystery” (Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 20).

The Rosary is one of the traditional paths of Christian prayer directed to the contemplation of Christ’s face. Pope Paul VI described it in these words: “As a Gospel prayer, centered on the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation, the Rosary is a prayer with a clearly Christological orientation. Its most characteristic element, in fact, the litany-like succession of Hail Marys, becomes in itself an unceasing praise of Christ, who is the ultimate object both of the Angel’s announcement and of the greeting of the Mother of John the Baptist: ‘Blessed is the fruit of your womb’ (Lk 1:42). We would go further and say that the succession of Hail Marys constitutes the warp on which is woven the contemplation of the mysteries. The Jesus that each Hail Mary recalls is the same Jesus whom the succession of mysteries proposes to us now as the Son of God, now as the Son of the Virgin” (*Marialis Cultus*, n. 46).

## A proposed addition to the traditional pattern

Of the many mysteries of Christ’s life, only a few are indicated by the Rosary in the form that has become generally established with the seal of the Church’s approval. The selection was determined by the origin of the prayer, which was based on the number 150, the number of the Psalms in the Psalter.

I believe, however, that to bring out fully the Christological depth of the Rosary it would be suitable to make an addition to the traditional pattern which, while left to the freedom of individuals and communities, could broaden it to include the mysteries of Christ’s public ministry between his Baptism

# “The Rosary marks the rhythm of human life”

and his Passion. In the course of those mysteries we contemplate important aspects of the person of Christ as the definitive revelation of God. Declared the beloved Son of the Father at the Baptism in the Jordan, Christ is the one who announces the coming of the Kingdom, bears witness to it in his works and proclaims its demands. It is during the years of his public ministry that the mystery of Christ is most evidently a mystery of light: “While I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (Jn 9:5).

Consequently, for the Rosary to become more fully a “compendium of the Gospel”, it is fitting to add, following reflection on the Incarnation and the hidden life of Christ (the joyful mysteries) and before focusing on the sufferings of his Passion (the sorrowful mysteries) and the triumph of his Resurrection (the glorious mysteries), a meditation on certain particularly significant moments in his public ministry (the mysteries of light). This addition of these new mysteries, without prejudice to any essential aspect of the prayer’s traditional format, is meant to give it fresh life and to enkindle renewed interest in the Rosary’s place within Christian spirituality as a true doorway to the depths of the Heart of Christ, ocean of joy and of light, of suffering and of glory.

## The Mysteries of Light

Moving on from the infancy and the hidden life in Nazareth to the public life of Jesus, our contemplation brings us to those mysteries which may be called in a special way “mysteries of light”. Certainly the whole mystery of Christ is a mystery of light. He is the “light of the world” (Jn 8:12). Yet this truth emerges in a special way during the years of his public life, when he proclaims the Gospel of the Kingdom. In proposing to the Christian community five significant moments – “luminous” mysteries – during this phase of Christ’s life, I think that the following can be fittingly singled out:

(1) His Baptism in the Jordan, (2) His self-manifestation at the wedding of Cana, (3) His proclamation of the Kingdom of God, with His call to conversion, (4) His Transfiguration, and finally, (5) His institution of the Eucharist, as the sacramental expression of the Paschal Mystery.

Each of these mysteries is a revelation of the Kingdom now present in the very person of Jesus. The Baptism in the Jordan is first of all a mystery of light. Here, as Christ descends into the waters, the innocent one who became “sin” for our sake (cf. 2 Cor 5:21), the heavens open wide and the voice of the Father declares him the beloved Son (cf. Mt 3:17 and parallels), while the Spirit descends on him to invest him with the mission which he is to carry out.

Another mystery of light is the first of the signs, given at Cana (cf. Jn 2:1-12), when Christ changes water into wine and opens the hearts of the disciples to faith, thanks to the intervention of Mary, the first among believers. Another mystery of light is the preaching by which Jesus proclaims the coming of the Kingdom of God, calls to conversion (cf. Mk 1:15) and forgives the sins of all who draw near to him in humble trust (cf. Mk 2:3-13; Lk 7:47-48): the inauguration of that ministry of mercy which he continues to exercise until the end of the world, particularly through the Sacrament of Reconciliation which he has entrusted to his Church (cf. Jn 20:22-23).

The mystery of light par excellence is the Transfiguration, traditionally believed to have taken place on Mount Tabor. The glory of the Godhead shines forth from the face of Christ as the Father commands the astonished Apostles to “listen to him” (cf. Lk 9:35 and parallels) and to prepare to experience with him the agony of the Passion, so as to come with him to the joy of the Resurrection and a life transfigured by the Holy Spirit. A final mystery of light is the institution of the Eucharist, in which Christ offers his body and blood as food under the signs of bread and wine, and testifies “to the end” his love for humanity (Jn 13:1), for whose salvation he will offer himself in sacrifice.

In these mysteries, apart from the miracle at Cana, the presence of Mary remains in the background. The Gospels make only the briefest reference to her occasional presence at one moment or other during the preaching of Jesus (cf. Mk 3:31-5; Jn 2:12), and they give no indication that she was present at the Last Supper and the institution of the Eucharist. Yet the role she assumed at Cana in some way accompanies Christ throughout his min-

istry. The revelation made directly by the Father at the Baptism in the Jordan and echoed by John the Baptist is placed upon Mary’s lips at Cana, and it becomes the great maternal counsel which Mary addresses to the Church of every age: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). This counsel is a fitting introduction to the words and signs of Christ’s public ministry and it forms the Marian foundation of all the “mysteries of light”.



The Holy Family of Nazareth

The cycles of meditation proposed by the Holy Rosary are by no means exhaustive, but they do bring to mind what is essential and they awaken in the soul a thirst for a knowledge of Christ continually nourished by the pure source of the Gospel. (...)

The Rosary is at the service of this ideal; it offers the “secret” which leads easily to a profound and inward knowledge of Christ. We might call it Mary’s way. It is the way of the example of the Virgin of Nazareth, a woman of faith, of silence, of attentive listening. It is also the way of a Marian devotion inspired by knowledge of the inseparable bond between Christ and his Blessed Mother: the mysteries of Christ are also in some sense the mysteries of his Mother, even when they do not involve her directly, for she lives from him and through him. By making our own the words of the Angel Gabriel and Saint Elizabeth contained in the Hail Mary, we find ourselves constantly drawn to seek out afresh in Mary, in her arms and in her heart, the “blessed fruit of her womb” (cf. Lk 1:42).

## Mystery of Christ, mystery of man

In my testimony of 1978 mentioned above, where I described the Rosary as my favourite prayer, I used an idea to which I would like to return. I said then that “the simple prayer of the Rosary marks the rhythm of human life”.

In the light of what has been said so far on the mysteries of Christ, it is not difficult to go deeper into this anthropological significance of the Rosary, which is far deeper than may appear at first sight. Anyone who contemplates Christ through the various stages of his life cannot fail to perceive in him the truth about man. This is the great affirmation of the Second Vatican Council which I have so often discussed in my own teaching since the Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*: “it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man is seen in its true light”.

The Rosary helps to open up the way to this light. Following in the path of Christ, in whom man’s path is “recapitulated”, revealed and redeemed, believers come face to face with the image of the true man. Contemplating Christ’s birth, they learn of the sanctity of life; seeing the household of Nazareth, they learn the original truth of the family according to God’s plan; listening to the Master in the mysteries of his public ministry, they find the light which leads them to enter the Kingdom of God; and fol-

lowing him on the way to Calvary, they learn the meaning of salvific suffering. Finally, contemplating Christ and his Blessed Mother in glory, they see the goal towards which each of us is called, if we allow ourselves to be healed and transformed by the Holy Spirit. It could be said that each mystery of the Rosary, carefully meditated, sheds light on the mystery of man.

At the same time, it becomes natural to bring to this encounter with the sacred humanity of the Redeemer all the problems, anxieties, labours and endeavours which go to make up our lives. “Cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you” (Ps 55:23). To pray the Rosary is to hand over our burdens to the merciful hearts of Christ and his Mother. Twenty-five years later, thinking back over the difficulties which have also been part of my exercise of the Petrine ministry, I feel the need to say once more, as a warm invitation to everyone to experience it personally: the Rosary does indeed “mark the rhythm of human life”, bringing it into harmony with the “rhythm” of God’s own life, in the joyful communion of the Holy Trinity, our life’s destiny and deepest longing.

## The Rosary, a way of assimilating the mystery

Meditation on the mysteries of Christ is proposed in the Rosary by means of a method designed to assist in their assimilation. It is a method based on repetition. This applies above all to the Hail Mary, repeated ten times in each mystery. If this repetition is considered superficially, there could be a temptation to see the Rosary as a dry and boring exercise. It is quite another thing, however, when the Rosary is thought of as an outpouring of that love which tirelessly returns to the person loved with expressions similar in their content but ever fresh in terms of the feeling pervading them.

In Christ, God has truly assumed a “heart of flesh”. Not only does God have a divine heart, rich in mercy and in forgiveness, but also a human heart, capable of all the stirrings of affection. If we needed evidence for this from the Gospel, we could easily find it in the touching dialogue between Christ and Peter after the Resurrection: “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Three times this question is put to Peter, and three times he gives the reply: “Lord, you know that I love you” (cf. Jn 21:15-17). Over and above the specific meaning of this passage, so important for Peter’s mission, none can fail to recognize the beauty of this triple repetition, in which the insistent request and the corresponding reply are expressed in terms familiar from the universal experience of human love. To understand the Rosary, one has to enter into the psychological dynamic proper to love.

One thing is clear: although the repeated Hail Mary is addressed directly to Mary, it is to Jesus that the act of love is ultimately directed, with her and through her. The repetition is nourished by the desire to be conformed ever more completely to Christ, the true programme of the Christian life. Saint Paul expressed this project with words of fire: “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). And again: “It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). The Rosary helps us to be conformed ever more closely to Christ until we attain true holiness. (...)

## A valid method that can be improved

The Rosary is simply a method of contemplation. As a method, it serves as a means to an end and cannot become an end in itself. All the same, as the fruit of centuries of experience, this method should not be undervalued. In its favour one could cite the experience of countless Saints. This is not to say, however, that the method cannot be improved. Such is the intent of the addition of the new series of *mysteria lucis* to the overall cycle of mysteries and of the few suggestions which I am proposing in this Letter regarding its manner of recitation. These suggestions, while respecting the well-established structure of this prayer, are intended to help the faithful to understand it in the richness of its symbolism and in harmony with the demands of daily life. Otherwise there is a risk that the Rosary would not only fail to produce the intended spiritual effects, but even that the beads, with which it is usually said, could come to be regarded as some kind of amulet or magic object, thereby radically distorting their meaning and function.

# Meditation is nourished by silence

## Announcing each mystery

Announcing each mystery, and perhaps even using a suitable icon to portray it, is as it were to open up a scenario on which to focus our attention. The words direct the imagination and the mind towards a particular episode or moment in the life of Christ. In the Church's traditional spirituality, the veneration of icons and the many devotions appealing to the senses, as well as the method of prayer proposed by Saint Ignatius of Loyola in the Spiritual Exercises, make use of visual and imaginative elements (the *compositio loci*), judged to be of great help in concentrating the mind on the particular mystery. This is a methodology, moreover, which corresponds to the inner logic of the Incarnation: in Jesus, God wanted to take on human features. It is through his bodily reality that we are led into contact with the mystery of his divinity.

This need for concreteness finds further expression in the announcement of the various mysteries of the Rosary. Obviously these mysteries neither replace the Gospel nor exhaust its content. The Rosary, therefore, is no substitute for lectio divina; on the contrary, it presupposes and promotes it. Yet, even though the mysteries contemplated in the Rosary, even with the addition of the *mysteria lucis*, do no more than outline the fundamental elements of the life of Christ, they easily draw the mind to a more expansive reflection on the rest of the Gospel, especially when the Rosary is prayed in a setting of prolonged recollection.

## Listening to the word of God

In order to supply a Biblical foundation and greater depth to our meditation, it is helpful to follow the announcement of the mystery with the proclamation of a related Biblical passage, long or short, depending on the circumstances. No other words can ever match the efficacy of the inspired word. As we listen, we are certain that this is the word of God, spoken for today and spoken "for me".

If received in this way, the word of God can become part of the Rosary's methodology of repetition without giving rise to the ennui derived from the simple recollection of something already well known. It is not a matter of recalling information but of allowing God to speak. In certain solemn communal celebrations, this word can be appropriately illustrated by a brief commentary.

## Silence

Listening and meditation are nourished by silence. After the announcement of the mystery and the proclamation of the word, it is fitting to pause and focus one's attention for a suitable period of time on the mystery concerned, before moving into vocal prayer. A discovery of the importance of silence is one of the secrets of practicing contemplation and meditation. One drawback of a society dominated by technology and the mass media is the fact that silence becomes increasingly difficult to achieve. Just as moments of silence are recommended in the Liturgy, so too in the recitation of the Rosary it is fitting to pause briefly after listening to the word of God, while the mind focuses on the content of a particular mystery.

## The "Our Father"

After listening to the word and focusing on the mystery, it is natural for the mind to be lifted up towards the Father. In each of his mysteries, Jesus always leads us to the Father, for as he rests in the Father's bosom (cf. Jn 1:18) he is continually turned towards him. He wants us to share in his intimacy with the Father, so that we can say with him: "Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). By virtue of his relationship to the Father he makes us brothers and sisters of himself and of one another, communicating to us the Spirit which is both his and the Father's. Acting as a kind of foundation for the Christological and Marian meditation which unfolds in the repetition of the Hail Mary, the Our Father makes meditation upon the mystery, even when carried out in solitude, an ecclesial experience.

## The ten "Hail Marys"

This is the most substantial element in the Rosary and also the one which makes it a Marian prayer par excellence. Yet when the Hail Mary is properly understood, we come to see clearly that its Marian character is not opposed to its Christological character, but that it actually emphasizes and

increases it. The first part of the Hail Mary, drawn from the words spoken to Mary by the Angel Gabriel and by Saint Elizabeth, is a contemplation in adoration of the mystery accomplished in the Virgin of Nazareth. These words express, so to speak, the wonder of heaven and earth; they could be said to give us a glimpse of God's own wonderment as he contemplates his "masterpiece" – the Incarnation of the Son in the womb of the Virgin Mary. If we recall how, in the Book of Genesis, God "saw all that he had made" (Gen 1:31), we can find here an echo of that "pathos with which God, at the dawn of creation, looked upon the work of his hands". The repetition of the Hail Mary in the Rosary gives us a share in God's own wonder and pleasure: in jubilant amazement we acknowledge the greatest miracle of history. Mary's prophecy here finds its fulfilment: "Henceforth all generations will call me blessed" (Lk 1:48).

The centre of gravity in the Hail Mary, the hinge as it were which joins its two parts, is the name of Jesus. Sometimes, in hurried recitation, this centre of gravity can be overlooked, and with it the connection to the mystery of Christ being contemplated. Yet it is precisely the emphasis given to the name of Jesus and to his mystery that is the sign of a meaningful and fruitful recitation of the Rosary. Pope Paul VI drew attention, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, to the custom in certain regions of highlighting the name of Christ by the addition of a clause referring to the mystery being contemplated.

This is a praiseworthy custom, especially during public recitation. It gives forceful expression to our faith in Christ, directed to the different moments of the Redeemer's life. It is at once a profession of faith and an aid in concentrating our meditation, since it facilitates the process of assimilation to the mystery of Christ inherent in the repetition of the Hail Mary. When we repeat the name of Jesus – the only name given to us by which we may hope for salvation (cf. Acts 4:12) – in close association with the name of his Blessed Mother, almost as if it were done at her suggestion, we set out on a path of assimilation meant to help us enter more deeply into the life of Christ.

From Mary's uniquely privileged relationship with Christ, which makes her the Mother of God, Theotokos, derives the forcefulness of the appeal we make to her in the second half of the prayer, as we entrust to her maternal intercession our lives and the hour of our death. (...)

## The concluding short prayer

In current practice, the Trinitarian doxology (*Gloria*) is followed by a brief concluding prayer which varies according to local custom. Without in any way diminishing the value of such invocations, it is worthwhile to note that the contemplation of the mysteries could better express their full spiritual fruitfulness if an effort were made to conclude each mystery with a prayer for the fruits specific to that particular mystery. In this way the Rosary would better express its connection with the Christian life. One fine liturgical prayer suggests as much, inviting us to pray that, by meditation on the mysteries of the Rosary, we may come to "imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise". (...)

## The Rosary beads

The traditional aid used for the recitation of the Rosary is the set of beads. At the most superficial level, the beads often become a simple counting mechanism to mark the succession of Hail Marys. Yet they can also take on a symbolism which can give added depth to contemplation.

Here the first thing to note is the way the beads converge upon the Crucifix, which both opens and closes the unfolding sequence of prayer. The life

and prayer of believers is centered upon Christ. Everything begins from him, everything leads towards him, everything, through him, in the Holy Spirit, attains to the Father.

As a counting mechanism, marking the progress of the prayer, the beads evoke the unending path of contemplation and of Christian perfection. Blessed Bartolo Longo saw them also as a "chain" which links us to God. A chain, yes, but a sweet chain; for sweet indeed is the bond to God who is also our Father. A "filial" chain which puts us in tune with Mary, the "handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1:38) and, most of all, with Christ himself, who, though he was in the form of God, made himself a "servant" out of love for us (Phil 2:7).

A fine way to expand the symbolism of the beads is to let them remind us of our many relationships, of the bond of communion and fraternity which unites us all in Christ.

## The opening and closing

At present, in different parts of the Church, there are many ways to introduce the Rosary. In some places, it is customary to begin with the opening words of Psalm 70: "O God, come to my aid; O Lord, make haste to help me", as if to nourish in those who are praying a humble awareness of their own insufficiency. In other places, the Rosary begins with the recitation of the Creed, as if to make the profession of faith the basis of the contemplative journey about to be undertaken. These and similar customs, to the

extent that they prepare the mind for contemplation, are all equally legitimate. The Rosary is then ended with a prayer for the intentions of the Pope, as if to expand the vision of the one praying to embrace all the needs of the Church. It is precisely in order to encourage this ecclesial dimension of the Rosary that the Church has seen fit to grant indulgences to those who recite it with the required dispositions.

If prayed in this way, the Rosary truly becomes a spiritual itinerary in which Mary acts as Mother, Teacher and Guide, sustaining the faithful by her powerful intercession.

Is it any wonder, then, that the soul feels the need, after saying this prayer and experiencing so profoundly the motherhood of Mary, to burst forth in praise of the Blessed Virgin, either in that splendid prayer the *Salve Regina* or in the *Litany of Loreto*? This is the crowning moment of an inner journey which has brought the faithful into living contact with the mystery of Christ and his Blessed Mother.

## Distribution over time

The Rosary can be recited in full every day, and there are those who most laudably do so. In this way it fills with prayer the days of many a contemplative, or keeps company with the sick and the elderly who have abundant time at their disposal. Yet it is clear – and this applies all the more if the new series of *mysteria lucis* is included – that many people will not be able to recite more than a part of the Rosary, according to a certain weekly pattern. This weekly distribution has the effect of giving the different days of the week a certain spiritual "colour", by analogy with the way in which the Liturgy colours the different seasons of the liturgical year.

According to current practice, Monday and Thursday are dedicated to the "joyful mysteries", Tuesday and Friday to the "sorrowful mysteries", and Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday to the "glorious mysteries". Where might the "mysteries of light" be inserted? If we consider that the "glorious mysteries" are said on both Saturday and Sunday, and that Saturday has always had a special Marian flavour, the second weekly meditation on the "joyful mysteries", mysteries in which Mary's presence is especially pronounced, could be moved to Saturday. Thursday would then be free for meditating on the "mysteries of light".

This indication is not intended to limit a rightful freedom in personal and community prayer, where



May 13, 2007 was the 90th anniversary of the first apparition at Fatima

account needs to be taken of spiritual and pastoral needs and of the occurrence of particular liturgical celebrations which might call for suitable adaptations. What is really important is that the Rosary should always be seen and experienced as a path of contemplation. In the Rosary, in a way similar to what takes place in the Liturgy, the Christian week, centred on Sunday, the day of Resurrection, becomes a journey through the mysteries of the life of Christ, and he is revealed in the lives of his disciples as the Lord of time and of history.

### “Blessed Rosary of Mary, sweet chain linking us to God”

What has been said so far makes abundantly clear the richness of this traditional prayer, which has the simplicity of a popular devotion but also the theological depth of a prayer suited to those who feel the need for deeper contemplation.

**The Church has always attributed particular efficacy to this prayer, entrusting to the Rosary, to its choral recitation and to its constant practice, the most difficult problems. At times when Christianity itself seemed under threat, its deliverance was attributed to the power of this prayer, and Our Lady of the Rosary was acclaimed as the one whose intercession brought salvation.**

Today I willingly entrust to the power of this prayer – as I mentioned at the beginning – the cause of peace in the world and the cause of the family.

### Peace

The grave challenges confronting the world at the start of this new Millennium lead us to think that only an intervention from on high, capable of guiding the hearts of those living in situations of conflict and those governing the destinies of nations, can give reason to hope for a brighter future.

The Rosary is by its nature a prayer for peace, since it consists in the contemplation of Christ, the Prince of Peace, the one who is “our peace” (Eph 2:14). Anyone who assimilates the mystery of Christ – and this is clearly the goal of the Rosary – learns the secret of peace and makes it his life’s project. Moreover, by virtue of its meditative character, with the tranquil succession of Hail Marys, the Rosary has a peaceful effect on those who pray it, disposing them to receive and experience in their innermost depths, and to spread around them, that true peace which is the special gift of the Risen Lord (cf. Jn 14:27; 20:21).

The Rosary is also a prayer for peace because of the fruits of charity which it produces. When prayed well in a truly meditative way, the Rosary leads to an encounter with Christ in his mysteries and so cannot fail to draw attention to the face of Christ in others, especially in the most afflicted. How could one possibly contemplate the mystery of the Child of Bethlehem, in the joyful mysteries, without experiencing the desire to welcome, defend and promote life, and to shoulder the burdens of suffering children all over the world? How could one possibly follow in the footsteps of Christ the Revealer, in the mysteries of light, without resolving to bear witness to his “Beatitudes” in daily life? And how could one contemplate Christ carrying the Cross and Christ Crucified, without feeling the need to act as a “Simon of Cyrene” for our brothers and sisters weighed down by grief or crushed by despair? Finally, how could one possibly gaze upon the glory of the Risen Christ or of Mary Queen of Heaven, without yearning to make this world more beautiful, more just, more closely conformed to God’s plan?

In a word, by focusing our eyes on Christ, the Rosary also makes us peacemakers in the world. By its nature as an insistent choral petition in harmony with Christ’s invitation to “pray ceaselessly” (Lk 18:1), the Rosary allows us to hope that, even today, the difficult “battle” for peace can be won. Far from offering an escape from the problems of the world, the Rosary obliges us to see them with responsible and generous eyes, and obtains for us the strength to face them with the certainty of God’s help and the firm intention of bearing witness in every situation to “love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:14).

### The family

As a prayer for peace, the Rosary is also, and always has been, a prayer of and for the family. **At one time this prayer was particularly dear to Christian families, and it certainly brought them closer together. It is important not to lose this precious inheritance.** We need to return to the

practice of family prayer and prayer for families, continuing to use the Rosary.

In my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* I encouraged the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours by the lay faithful in the ordinary life of parish communities and Christian groups; I now wish to do the same for the Rosary. These two paths of Christian contemplation are not mutually exclusive; they complement one another. I would therefore ask those who devote themselves to the pastoral care of families to recommend heartily the recitation of the Rosary.

The family that prays together stays together. The Holy Rosary, by age-old tradition, has shown itself particularly effective as a prayer which brings the family together. Individual family members, in turning their eyes towards Jesus, also regain the ability to look one another in the eye, to communicate, to show solidarity, to forgive one another and to see their covenant of love renewed in the Spirit of God.

Many of the problems facing contemporary families, especially in economically developed societies, result from their increasing difficulty in communicating. Families seldom manage to come together, and the rare occasions when they do are often taken up with watching television. To return to the recitation of the family Rosary means filling daily life with very different images, images of the mystery of salvation: the image of the Redeemer, the image of his most Blessed Mother. The family that recites the Rosary together reproduces something of the atmosphere of the household of Nazareth: its members place Jesus at the centre, they share his joys and sorrows, they place their needs and their plans in his hands, they draw from him the hope and the strength to go on.

### The Rosary, a treasure to be rediscovered

Dear brothers and sisters! A prayer so easy and yet so rich truly deserves to be rediscovered by the Christian community. Let us do so, especially this year, as a means of confirming the direction outlined in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, from which the pastoral plans of so many particular Churches have drawn inspiration as they look to the immediate future.

I turn particularly to you, my dear Brother Bishops, priests and deacons, and to you, pastoral agents in your different ministries: through your own personal experience of the beauty of the Rosary, may you come to promote it with conviction.

I also place my trust in you, theologians: by your sage and rigorous reflection, rooted in the word of God and sensitive to the lived experience of the Christian people, may you help them to discover the Biblical foundations, the spiritual riches and the pastoral value of this traditional prayer.

I count on you, consecrated men and women, called in a particular way to contemplate the face of Christ at the school of Mary.

I look to all of you, brothers and sisters of every state of life, to you, Christian families, to you, the sick and elderly, and to you, young people: confidently take up the Rosary once again. Rediscover the Rosary in the light of Scripture, in harmony with the Liturgy, and in the context of your daily lives.

May this appeal of mine not go unheard! At the start of the twenty-fifth year of my Pontificate, I entrust this Apostolic Letter to the loving hands of the Virgin Mary, prostrating myself in spirit before her image in the splendid Shrine built for her by Blessed Bartolo Longo, the apostle of the Rosary. I willingly make my own the touching words with which he concluded his well-known Supplication to the Queen of the Holy Rosary: “O Blessed Rosary of Mary, sweet chain which unites us to God, bond of love which unites us to the angels, tower of salvation against the assaults of Hell, safe port in our universal shipwreck, we will never abandon you. You will be our comfort in the hour of death: yours our final kiss as life ebbs away. And the last word from our lips will be your sweet name, O Queen of the Rosary of Pompei, O dearest Mother, O Refuge of Sinners, O Sovereign Consoler of the Afflicted. May you be everywhere blessed, today and always, on earth and in heaven”.

From the Vatican, on the 16th day of October in the year 2002, the beginning of the twenty-fifth year of my Pontificate.

**POPE JOHN PAUL II**

# THE BROWN SCAPULAR

In the 13th century Our Lady appeared to Saint Simon Stock, and gave him the brown scapular saying that whoever wore it would be preserved from eternal damnation and on the first Saturday after their death, would be taken by her to Heaven. The wearing of the scapular is an outward sign of inward commitment to virtue and Christian piety, under the patronage of Mary.

The Church teaches us to believe that those who hold an intimate and faithful devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary will be particularly blessed by her. Thus the wearing of her brown scapular signifies a pledge of our part and a promise on hers. Placing us under her protection, it becomes an aid throughout life to help us maintain the virtues of our vocations. As an outward profession of dedication and trust in Mary, it necessarily calls down special grace, for she would share the sentiments of her Son who said: “If anyone openly declares himself for Me in the presence of men, the Son of Man will declare Himself for him in the presence of God’s angels.” (Luke 12:8)



The Mother of God will continue to aid after their deaths those who have served her faithfully, and this aid will be especially extended on Saturdays, the day dedicated to her. The scapulars consist essentially of two quadrilateral segments of woolen cloth (about two and three-quarter inches long by two inches wide), connected with each other by two strings or bands in such a manner that, when the bands rest on the shoulders, the front segment rests before the breast, while the other hangs down an equal distance at the back.

To share in the indulgences and privileges of a scapular, one must wear it constantly; it may be worn over or under one’s clothing and may be laid aside for a short time, if necessary. Should one have ceased wearing the scapular for a long period (even through indifference), one gains none of the indulgences, during this time, but, by simply resuming the scapular, one again participates in the indulgences, privileges, etc. The scapular may be given to any Catholic, even to a baby. It may be given in any place, including a sick room.

The promise to those who wear the Scapular states that Mary will intercede to ensure that the wearer of the Scapular obtains the grace of dying in a state of grace.

### The Sabbatine Privilege

The Scapular even extends to Purgatory. The name *Sabbatine Privilege* is derived from the apocryphal Bull “*Sacratissimo uti culmine*” of Pope John XXII, March 3, 1322. Through the Sabbatine Privilege, we can be released from Purgatory on the first Saturday (Sabbath) after death. There are three requirements to make oneself eligible for this privilege: first, we must wear the Scapular; second, observe chastity according to our state of life and third, recite the Little Office of Our Blessed Mother (The Rosary can be substituted for the office by obtaining permission from a priest.)

It is an act of charity to make the Sabbatine Privilege known to all. A soul from Purgatory was asked by a Sister: “What is the average stay of the souls in Purgatory?” The poor soul answered: “From thirty to forty years!” Can you see the importance of making Our Lady’s Privilege known – if you consider that the flames are the same as the fires of Hell!

We give you the message of one pastor. He said: “If I were positive that all my parishioners died wearing the Brown Scapular, I would be most certain that we would all meet in Heaven.”

# INDULGENCES FOR SAYING THE ROSARY

An indulgence is the remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, a remission, which one of the faithful, properly disposed and under certain definite conditions, can acquire through the Church, which authoritatively dispenses, applying the treasure of the satisfactions of Christ and the Saints.

An indulgence is either PLENARY or PARTIAL, depending upon whether it frees one from the whole or from a part of the temporal punishment due to sin.

This means that one of the faithful who, with at least a contrite heart, performs a work enriched with a partial indulgence, is granted by the power of the Church that same amount of remission of temporal punishment as he has already obtained by the work itself. In other words, the remission is doubled, and that as often as the work prescribed is performed.

A plenary indulgence means a full remission of temporal punishment, provided that several other conditions apply, in addition to the work performed or prayer said.

The faithful, whenever they recite a third (five decades) part of the Rosary with devotion, may gain:

1. A partial indulgence
2. A plenary indulgence on the usual conditions, if they do this for an entire month.

If they recite a third part of the Rosary in company with others, either in public or in private, they may gain:

1. A partial indulgence, once a day;
2. A plenary indulgence on the last Sunday of each month, with the addition of Confession, Communion and a visit to a church or a public oratory, if they perform such a recitation at least three times in any of the preceding weeks.

If however they recite this together in family group, besides the partial indulgence, they are granted:

A plenary indulgence twice a month, if they perform this recitation, daily for a month, go to Confession, receive Holy Communion, and visit some church or public oratory.

The faithful who daily recite a third part of the Rosary with devotion in a family group besides the indulgences already granted under 1. are also granted a Plenary indulgence on condition of Confession and Communion on each Saturday, on two other days of the week, and on each of the Feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Universal Calendar namely: the Immaculate Conception, the Purification, the Apparition of our Blessed Lady at Lourdes, the Annunciation, the Seven Dolors (Friday of Passion Week), the Visitation, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel; Our Lady of the Snows, the Assumption, the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, the Seven Dolors (Sept 15), Our Lady of Ransom, the Most Holy Rosary, the Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin.

Those who piously recite a third part of the Rosary in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, publicly exposed or even reserved in the tabernacle, as often as they do this, may gain:

A plenary indulgence, on condition of Confession and Communion.



The faithful who at any time of the year devoutly offer their prayers in honor of our Lady of the Rosary, with the intention of continuing the same for 9 consecutive days, may gain:

A partial indulgence on any day of the novena;

A plenary indulgence on the usual conditions at the close of the novena.

The faithful who resolve to perform a devout exercise in honor of Our Lady of the Rosary for 15 uninterrupted Saturdays (or these being impeded, for any respective Sundays immediately following) if they devoutly recite at least a third part of the Rosary or meditate on its mysteries in some other manner may gain:

A plenary indulgence on the usual conditions on any of these 15 Saturdays, or corresponding Sundays.

The faithful who during the month of October recite at least a third part of the Rosary, either publicly or privately, may gain:

1. A partial indulgence each day;
2. A plenary indulgence, if they perform this devout exercise on the Feast of the Rosary and throughout the Octave, and moreover, go to confession, receive Holy Communion and visit a church;

A plenary indulgence, with the addition of confession, Communion and visit to a church, if they perform this same recitation of the Holy Rosary for at least 10 days after the Octave of the aforesaid Feast.

A partial indulgence may be gained once a day by the faithful who kissing a blessed Rosary, which they carry with them, at the same time recite the first part of the Hail Mary up to "Jesus" inclusive.

## Fifteen promises made by Our Blessed Mother to those who faithfully recite the Rosary

1. To all those who shall pray my Rosary devoutly, I promise my special protection and great graces.
2. Those who shall persevere in the recitation of my Rosary will receive some special grace.
3. The Rosary will be a very powerful armor against hell; it will destroy vice, deliver from sin and dispel heresy.
4. The Rosary will make virtue and good works flourish, and will obtain for souls the most abundant divine mercies. It will draw the hearts of men from the love of the world and its vanities, and will lift them to the desire of eternal things. Oh, that souls would sanctify themselves by this means.
5. Those who trust themselves to me through the Rosary will not perish.
6. Whoever recites my Rosary devoutly reflecting on the mysteries, shall never be overwhelmed by misfortune. He will not experience the anger of God nor will he perish by an unprovided death. The sinner will be converted; the just will persevere in grace and merit eternal life.
7. Those truly devoted to my Rosary shall not die without the sacraments of the Church.
8. Those who are faithful to recite my Rosary shall have during their life and at their death the light of God and the plenitude of His graces and will share in the merits of the blessed.
9. I will deliver promptly from purgatory souls devoted to my Rosary.
10. True children of my Rosary will enjoy great glory in heaven.
11. What you shall ask through my Rosary you shall obtain.
12. To those who propagate my Rosary I promise aid in all their necessities.
13. I have obtained from my Son that all the members of the Rosary Confraternity shall have as their intercessors, in life and in death, the entire celestial court.
14. Those who recite my Rosary faithfully are my beloved children, the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.
15. Devotion to my Rosary is a special sign of predestination.

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# HOW TO SAY THE ROSARY

## The Joyful Mysteries



**The Annunciation**  
*Fruit: Humility*



**The Visitation**  
*Fruit: Love of Neighbor*



**The Nativity**  
*Fruit: Poverty*



**Presentation**  
*Fruit: Obedience*



**Finding in the Temple**  
*Fruit: Joy in Jesus*

## The Luminous Mysteries



**Baptism of Jesus**  
*Fruit: Openness*



**Wedding at Cana**  
*Fruit: Proclaiming Heaven*



**Proclaiming the Kingdom**  
*Fruit: Repentance*



**Transfiguration**  
*Fruit: Desire for Holiness*



**Institution of the Eucharist**  
*Fruit: Adoration*

## The Sorrowful Mysteries



**The Agony**  
*Fruit: Sorrow for Sin*



**The Scourging**  
*Fruit: Purity*



**The Crowning**  
*Fruit: Courage*



**The Carrying**  
*Fruit: Patience*



**The Crucifixion**  
*Fruit: Perseverance*

## The Glorious Mysteries



**The Resurrection**  
*Fruit: Faith*



**The Ascension**  
*Fruit: Hope*



**Descent of the Holy Spirit**  
*Fruit: Love of God*



**The Assumption**  
*Fruit: Grace of a happy death*



**The Coronation**  
*Fruit: Trust in Mary*

### Sign Of The Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting, Amen.

### Our Father

Our Father, who art in Heaven; hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. Amen

### Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen

### Glory Be

Glory be to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end, Amen.

### O My Jesus

O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, and lead all souls to Heaven, especially those in most need of Thy Mercy. Amen.

### Hail, Holy Queen

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us. And after this our exile, show unto us the blessed Fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

### The Angel Prayer

Angel of God, my Guardian dear, to whom His love commits me here, ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.

## Consecration to the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary

O Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary, we come to you this day to compassionate Your sorrows and to consecrate ourselves to You. We come to consecrate to Your Heart, to console it, the Pilgrims of St. Michael and their Work. May our hearts beat in union with Yours. We want to live like You and with You, in love of purity, O Immaculate Heart, in the generosity of sacrifice, O Sorrowful Heart, in an ardent love for God and for our brethren, a fruitful and true love, O maternal Heart.

Triumph soon, O Immaculate Heart, powerfully plead our cause before the tribunal of God. That through you, mercy triumphs over justice. Convert us, convert sinners, convert Russia. Cause O triumphant Heart, to have established on earth, a true and lasting peace, the peace of Christ, in the reign of Christ. Amen.